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THE AMERICA LETTER.

"ARRAH, Judy!" quoth Biddy Finnegan, running to a neighbour's door.

"Arrah, why?" answered the party summoned.

"Arrah, did you hear the news?"

"No, then, what is it?"

"Sure there's an Amerikey letter in the post-office."

"Whisht!"

"Sorrah a word of lie in it. Mickeen Dunn brought word from the town this morning; and he says more betoken that it's from Dinny M'Daniel to his ould mother."

"Ob, then, troth I'll be bound that's a lie, e'er-a-way: the born vagabond, there wasn't that much good in him, egg or bird: the idle, worthless ruffian, that was the ruination of every one he kem near: the, the——"

"Softly, Judith, softly; don't wrong the absent: it is from Dinny M'Daniel to his ould mother, and contains money more-over;" and she then proceeded to tell how the postmistress had desired the poor widow to bring some responsible person that might guarantee her identity, before such a weighty affair was given into her keeping, for who knew what might be inside of it? though a still greater puzzle was to discover by what means the much reprobated Dinny obtained even the price of the letter-paper; and how old Sibby had borrowed a cloak from one, and a "clane cap" from another, and the huxter had harnessed his ass and car to bring her in style, and Corney King the contingent man,* that knows all the quality, was going along with her to certify that she was the veritable Mrs Sybilla M'Daniel of Tullybawn; and how she would have for an escort every man, woman, and child in the village that could make a holiday—compliments cheerfully accorded by each and all, to do honour to the America letter, and the individual whose superscription it bore.

Dinny M'Daniel was the widow's one son, born even in her widowhood, for his father had been killed by the fall of a tree before he had been six months married, and poor Sibby had nothing to lavish her fondness upon but her curly-headed gossoon, who very naturally grew up to be the greatest scapegrace in the parish. He had the most unlucky knack of throwing stones ever possessed by any wight for his sins; not a day passed over his head without a list of damages and disasters being furnished to his poor mother, in the shape of fowls killed and maimed, and children half murdered, or pitchers and occasionally windows made smithereens of; but to do him justice, his breakage in this latter article was not very considerable, there being but few opportunities for practice in Tullybawn. To all these the poor widow had but one reply, "Arrah, what would you have me do?—sorrah a bit of harm in him; it's all element, and what ud be the good of batin' him?" At last the neighbours, utterly worn out by the peticinacity of his misdemeanours, hit upon an expedient to render him harmless for at least half the day, and enjoy that much of their lives in peace, with the ultimate chance of perhaps converting the parish nuisance into a useful character. A quarterly subscription of a penny for each house would just suffice to send Dinny to school to a neighbouring pedagogue, wonderful in the sciences of reading and writing, and, what was a much greater recommendation under the present circumstances, the "divil entirely at the taws." To him accordingly Dinny was sent, and under his discipline spent some five or six years of comparative harmlessness, during which he mastered the Reading-made-Easy, the Seven Champions, Don Bellianis, and sundry other of those pleasing narratives whereby the pugnacity and gallantry of the Irish character used whilom to be formed, to which acquirement he added in process of time that of writing, or at least making pothooks and hangers, with a symmetry that delighted the heart of poor Sibby. The neighbours began to think better of him; but the "masther" swore he was a prodigy, and openly declared, that if he would but "turn the Vosther," he'd be fit company for any lady in the land. Thus encouraged, Dinny attempted and succeeded, for he had some talent. But sure enough the turning of the Voster finished him.

It was now high time for Master Dinny to begin to earn his bread, and accordingly his mother sought and obtained for him a place in the garden of a nobleman who resided near the village, and was its landlord: but the disnay of the gossoon himself when this disparaging piece of good fortune was announced to him, was unbounded. He was speechless, and some moments elapsed before he could ejaculate,

* Collector of county cess.

"Fwhy, then, tare-an'-ages, mother, is that what you lay out for me, an' me afther turnin' the Vosther?"

Sibby expostulated, but in vain; his exploits in "the Vosther" had set him beside himself, and he boldly declared that nothing short of a dacin't clerkship would ever satisfy his ambition. A man of one argument was Dinny M'Daniel, and that one he made serve all purposes—"Is it an' me afther turnin' the Vosther!"—so that people said it was turn about with him, for the Voster had turned his brain. Be that as it may, there was one who agreed with Dinny that he could never think too highly of himself, for, like every other scapegrace on record, he had won the goodwill of the prettiest girl in the parish. Nelly Dolan's friends, however, were both too snug and too prudent to leave her any hope of their acquiescing in her choice, so the lovers were driven to resort to secrecy. Dinny urged her to elope with him, knowing that her kin, when they had no remedy, would give her a fortune to set matters to rights; but she had not as yet reached that pitch of evil courage which would allow her to take such a step, nor, unfortunately, had she the good courage to discontinue such a hopeless connection, or the clandestine proceedings which its existence required. Alas, for poor Nelly! sorrow and shame were the consequence. The bright eyes, that used to pass for a very proverb through the whole barony, grew dim—the rosy cheeks, that more than one ballad-maker had celebrated, grew wan and fallow—and the slim and graceful figure—in a word, Dinny had played the ruffian, and had to fly the country to avoid the murderous indignation of her faction. It was to America he shaped his flight, though how he had obtained the means no one could divine; and now, after the lapse of nearly a year and a half, here was a letter from him to solve all speculations.

What a hubbub the arrival of "an America letter" causes in Ireland over the whole district blessed by its visit! It is quite a public concern—a joint property—being in fact always regarded as a general communication from all the neighbours abroad to all the neighbours at home, and its perusal a matter of intense and agonising interest to all who have a relative even in the degree of thirty-first cousin among the emigrants. Let us take for instance the letter in question, for the cavalcade has returned, and not only is the widow's cabin full, but the very bawn before her door is crowded, and the door itself completely blocked up with an array of heads, poking forward in the vain attempt to catch a tone of the schoolmaster's voice as he publishes the contents of the desired epistle, and absolutely smothering it by the uproar of their squabbles, as they endeavour each to obtain a better place.

"Tare-an'-eunties, Tom Bryan, fwhat are you pushing me away for, an' me wanting to hear fwhat's become of my own first cousin!"

"Arrah, don't be talkin', man—fwhy wouldn't I thry to get in, an' half the letter about my sister-in-law?"

"Oh, boys, boys, agra, does any of yees hear e'er a word about my poor Paddy?"

The last speaker is a woman, poor Biddy Casey: for the last three years not a letter came from America that she could hear of, whether far or near, but she attended to hear it read, in the hope of getting some information about her husband, who, driven away by bad times and an injudicious agent, had made a last exertion to emigrate, and earn something for his family. Regularly every market-day from that event she called at the post-office, at first with the confident tone of assured expectation, to inquire for an America letter for one Biddy Casey; then when her heart began to sicken with apprehensions arising from the oft-repeated negative, her question was, "You haven't e'er a letter for me to-day, ma'am?" and then when she could no longer trust herself to ask, she merely presented her well-known face at the window, and received the usual answer in heartbroken silence, now and then broken by the joyless ejaculation, "God in heaven help me!" But from that time to this not a syllable has she been able to learn of his fate, or even of his existence. Now, however, her labours and anxieties are to have an end—but what an end! This letter at last affords her the information that, tempted by the delusive promise of higher wages, her husband was induced to set out for the unwholesome south, and long since has found a grave among the deadly swamps of New Orleans.

But like every thing else in life, Dinny M'Daniel's letter is a chequered matter. See, here comes a lusty, red-cheeked damsel, elbowing her way out of the cabin, her eyes bursting out of her head with joy.

"Well, Peggy—well—well!" is echoed on all sides as they

crowd around her; "any news from Bid?—though, troth, we needn't ax you."

"Oh, grand news!" is the delighted answer. "Bid has a wonderful fine place for herself an' another for me, an' my passage is ped, an' I'm to be ready in five weeks, an', widdy! widdy! I dunna what to do with myself."

"And, Peggy agra, was there any thing about our Mick?"—"or our Sally, Peggy?"—"or Johnny Golloher, ashore?" are the questions with which she is inundated.

"Oh, I dunna, I dunna—I couldn't listen with the joy, I tell ye."

"But, Peggy alanna, what will Tom Feeny think of all this? and what is to become, pray, of all the vows and promises which, to our own certain knowledge, you made each other coming home from the dance the other night?"

Pooh! that difficulty is removed long ago—the very first money she earns in America is to be dispatched to the care of Father Cahill, to pay Tom's passage over to her. "And will she do such a shameless thing?" some fair reader will probably ask. Ay will she; and think herself right well off, moreover, to have the shame to bear; for though Peggy can dig her ridge of potatoes beside the best man in the parish, her heart is soft and leal like nine hundred and ninety-nine out of the thousand of her countrywomen.

Another happy face—see, here comes old Malachi Tighe, clapping his hands, and looking up to heaven in silent thankfulness, for his "bouchal bawn, the glory of his heart," is to be home with him before harvest, with as much money as would buy the bit o' land out and out, and his daughter-in-law is fainting with gladness, and his grandchildren screaming with delight, and the neighbours wish him joy with all the earnestness of sympathy, for Johnny Tighe has been a favourite.

Woe, woe, woe!—Mick Finnegan has sent a message of fond encouragement to his sweetheart, which she never must hear, for typhus, the scourge of Ireland, has made her his victim, and the daisies have already rooted on her grave, and are blooming there as fresh and fair as she used to be herself; and the wounds of her kindred are opened anew, and the death-wail is raised again, as wild and vehement as if she died but yesterday, although six weeks have passed since they bore her to Saint John's.

What comes next?—"Johnny Golloher has got married to a Munster girl with a stocking full of money;" and Nanny Mulry laughs at the news until you'd think her sides ought to ache, and won't acknowledge that she cares one pin about it—on the contrary, wishes him the best of good luck, and hopes he may never be made a world's wonder of; all which proceedings are viewed by the initiated as so many proofs positive of her intention, on the first convenient opportunity, to break her heart for the defaulting Mr Golloher.

But among the crowd of earnest listeners who thus attended to gratify their several curiosities by the perusal of Dinny's unexpected letter, none failed to remark the absence of her who in the course of nature was, or should be, most deeply interested in the welfare of the departed swain. Nelly Dolan never came near them. In the hovel where the poor outcast had been permitted to take up her abode when turned out of doors by her justly incensed father, she sat during the busy recital, her head bowed down and resting upon the wheel from which she drew the support of herself and her infant. Now and then a sob, almost loud enough to awaken the baby sleeping in a *cleave* beside her, broke from her in spite of herself; while her mother, who had ventured to visit her on the occasion, sat crouched down on the hearth before her, and angrily upbraided her for her sorrow.

"Whisht, I tell you, whisht!" exclaimed the old crone, "an' have a sperrit, what you never had, or it wouldn't come to your day to be brought to trouble by the likes of him."

"Och, mother darlint," answered the sufferer, "don't blame me—it's a poor thing, God knows, that I must sit here quiet, an' his letter readin' within a few doors o' me."

"Arrah, you'd better go beg for a sight of it," rejoined the angry parent with a sneer; "do, achorra, until you find out what little trouble you give him."

"It's not for myself, it's not for myself," answered the sobbing girl. "I can do without his thoughts or his favours; all I care to know is, what he says about the baby."

"Pursuin' to me!" exclaimed her mother, "but often as you tempted me to brain it, an' that's often enough, you never put the devil so strong into my heart as you do this minute. So be quiet, I tell you."

"Och, mother, that's the hard heart."

"Musha, then, it well becomes you to talk that way," replied her mother. "If your own wasn't a taste too soft in its time, my darlint, your kith an' kin wouldn't have to skulk away as they do when your name's spoken of."

A fresh burst of tears was all the answer poor Nelly could give to this invective; an answer, however, as well calculated as any other to stimulate the wrath and arouse the eloquence of Mrs Dolan, the object of whose visit was to induce Nelly to assume an air of perfect coolness and nonchalance—in fine, to show she had a "sperrit." In this it may be perceived she met with a signal failure; and now the full brunt of her indignation fell on the unfortunate recreant. Nelly's sorrow of course became louder, and between both parties the child was awakened, and naturally added its small help to the clamour: nor did the united uproar of the three generations cease until a crowd unexpectedly appeared at the door of the hovel, and the voice of Sibby M'Daniel, half mad with joy, was heard through the din, internal and external.

"Well, if she won't come to us," spoke the elated Sibby, "we must only go to her, you know, though ye'll allow the news was worth lookin' after;" and ere the sentence was well concluded, she with her whole train had made their way into the cabin.

"God save all here," continued Sibby, "not excepting yourself, Mrs Dolan; for we must forgive and forget everything that was betune us, now."

"An' if I forgive an' forget, what have you to swop for it?" asked the irrate individual so addressed.

"Good news an' the hoith of it," was the answer of Sibby, as she displayed her letter; but Mrs Dolan was in no humour to listen to news or receive conciliation of any kind, and so she conducted herself like a woman of "sperrit;" and gathering her garments about her, rose slowly and stately from the undignified posture in which she was discovered, and so departed from amongst them.

"Musha, then, fair weather after you," was the exclamation of Sibby when she recovered from the surprise created by this exhibition of undisguised contempt. "Joy be with you, and if you never come back, it'll be no great loss, for the never a word about you in it anyhow, you ould sarprint. But, Nelly, alanna, it's you an' me that ought to spend the livelong day down on our marrowbones with joy and thankfulness, though you didn't think his letter worth lookin' after;" and down on her marrowbones poor Nelly sank to receive the welcome communication, her baby clasped to her bosom, her glazed eyes raised to heaven, all unconscious of the crowd by which she was surrounded, and her every nerve trembling with excess of joy and thankfulness, while the bustling Sibby placed a chair for the schoolmaster near the loophole that answered the purposes of a window, and loudly enjoining silence, gave into his hands the epistle of his favoured pupil to read to the assembled auditors for about the sixth time; and Mr Soolivan, squaring himself for the effort, proceeded to edify Nelly Dolan therewith.

The letter went on to state, in the peculiarly felicitous language of Dinny M'Daniel, that on his arrival in New York, and finding himself without either friends or money, and thus in some danger of starvation, he began to lower his opinions of his personal worth, and solicit any species of employment that could be given to him. After some difficulty he got to be porter to a large grocery establishment, in which he conducted himself pretty well, and secured the confidence of his employers, and a rate of wages moderate, but still sufficient to support him. The sense of his utter dependence upon his character compelled him to be most particularly cautious of doing anything to affect it in the slightest degree, and in process of time he became a changed gossoon altogether, an example of the blessed fruits of adversity. The thoughts of Nelly Dolan and his old mother never quitted him, his anxieties about the former clinging to him with such intensity that he began forthwith to lay by a little money every week to send her, but was ashamed to write until he should have it gathered. An unfortunate event, however, soon put a stop to his accumulation, and drove him to use it for his subsistence. This was no less than the sudden death of the head of the establishment in which he was employed, which, he being the entire manager of the concern, had the consequence of breaking it up completely. Thus Dinny was cast on the world again, and found employment as difficult to be got as ever. His little hoard was soon spent, and at last he had to turn his steps westward, where labour was more plentiful and hands fewer. After many journeys and vicissitudes he at length

met a friend in the person of one of the partners in the grocery establishment which had first given him employment, and who, like himself, had sought a home in the wilderness. This man had some money, but, unfortunately for himself, never having "turned the Vosther" or learned anything in accounts, was unable to put it to any use that would require a knowledge of what a facetious alderman once called the three R's, reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. Now, these happened to be Dinny's forte. So when his quondam employer was one day lamenting to him the deficiency which forbade him to apply his capital to the lucrative uses which he otherwise might, Dinny modestly suggested a method whereby this desirable object might be effected: the other, after a little consideration, thought he might do worse than adopt it, and accordingly, before many days elapsed, a grand new store appeared in the township of Prishprashchawmanraw, in which Dinny was book-keeper and junior partner. Having brought him thus far by our assistance, we shall allow him to conclude his letter after his own way:—

"And so you see, dear mother, that notwithstanding all the neighbours said, it's as lucky after all that I turned the Vosther, for it has made a man of me, and with the help of the holy St Patrick I am well able to spare the twenty pounds you will get inside, which is half for yourself to make your old days comfortable, or to come out to me, if you'd like that better, and the other half for my poor darling Nelly, the *colleen dhas dhun*, that I am afraid spent many a heavy hour on my account; but you may tell her that with the help of God I will live to make up for them all. I will expect her at New York by the next ship, and you may tell her that the first thing she is to buy with the money must be a grand goold ring, and let her put it on her finger at once, without waiting for either priest or parson, for I'm her sworn husband already, and will bring her straight to the priest the minute she puts her foot on America shore, and until then who dare sneeze at her? You must write to me to say where I am to meet her, and by what ship she will come out; and above all, *whether she is to bring any thing out with her besides herself*—you know what I mean. And, dear mother, when you write to me, you are to put on the back of the letter, Dennis M'Daniel, Esq. for that's what I am now—not a word of lie in it. So wishing the best of good luck to all the neighbours, and to yourself and to Nelly, I remain, &c. &c. &c."

"Glory to you, Dinny!" was ejaculated on every side, while they all rushed tumultuously forward to congratulate the unwedded bride. In their uproarious hands we leave her, drawing this moral from the whole thing, that it's very hard to spoil an Irishman entirely, if there be any good at all in him originally.

A. M'C.

THE THREE MONKS.

"It was with the good monks of old that sterling hospitality was to be found."—HANSBROVE'S IRISH GAZETTEER.

Three monks sat by a bogwood fire!

Shaven their crowns, and their garments grey;

Close they sat to that bogwood fire,

Watching the wicket till break of day—

Such was ever the rule at Kilcrea:*

For whoever passed, be he baron or squire,

Was free to call at that abbey, and stay,

Nor guerdon or hire for his lodging pay,

Though he tarried a week with the Holy Quire!

Three monks sat by a bogwood fire!

Dark look'd the night from the window-pane!

They who sat by that bogwood fire

Were Eustace, Alleyn, and Giles by name:

Long they gazed at the cheerful flame,

Till each from his neighbour began to inquire

The tale of his life, before he came

To Saint Bridget's shrine, and the cowl had ta'en:

So they piled on more wood, and drew their seats nigher!

Three monks sat by a bogwood fire!

Loud wailed the wind through cloister and nave!

With penitent air by that bogwood fire

The first that spake it was Eustace grave,

And told, "He had been a soldier brave

In his youth, till a comrade he slew in ire;
Since then he forswore helmet and glaive,
And, leaving his home, had crossed the wave,
And taken the cross and cowl at Saint Finbar's spire!"

Three monks sat by a bogwood fire!

Swift through the glen ran the river Lee!

And Alleyn next, by that bogwood fire,

Told his tale—a woeful man was he:

Alas, he had loved unlawfully

The wife of his brother, Sir Hugh Maguire!

And he fled to the cloister to free

His soul from sin:—'twas sad to see

How sorrow had worn the youthful friar!

Three monks sat by a bogwood fire!

And red the light on the rafters shone,

And the last who spoke by that bogwood fire

Was Giles, of the three the only one

Whom care or grief had not lit upon;

But rosy and round, throughout city and shire

His mate for frolic and glee was none;

And soon he told how "A peasant's son,

He was reared to the church by their former Prior!"

Three monks sat by a bogwood fire!

The moon look'd o'er all with clouded ray;

And there they sat by that bogwood fire,

Watching the wicket till break of day;

And many that night did call, and stay,

Whose names—if, gentles, ye do not tire—

In next strain shall the bard essay—

(Many and motley I ween were they)—

Till then, pardon he craves for his humble lyre!

And to each and all,

Benedicite!

* * *

COMPARATIVE VALUE OF BLACK BOYS IN AMERICA AND IRELAND.

It has not unfrequently occurred to us as a thing somewhat remarkable, that there is a vast difference in the comparative value of the black boys of America and those of Ireland; and this was very forcibly proved to us on a recent occasion. The American little blacks are, as we have been credibly informed, to be bought for forty dollars and upwards, according to their health, strength, and beauty; the Irish blackies for about a twentieth of that sum; and as everything is valued in proportion to its cost, it follows as a matter of course that the American urchins are vastly more prized and better taken care of than the Irish. It is not very easy to account for this, but perhaps it is only a consequence of difference of race. The American black boys are supposed to be the descendants of Cham—true woolly-headed chaps, with the colouring matter of their complexion deposited beneath their outer skin, and not washoffable by means of soap and water. The Irish black boys generally are believed to be of the true Caucasian breed—the descendants of Japhet; and their blackness is on the outer surface of the skin, and may, though we believe with difficulty, be removed. But we will not speak dogmatically on this point. In other respects they agree tolerably. They have both the power of bearing heat to a considerable degree, and of dispensing with the incumbrance of much clothing. But it is in their relative value that they most differ, and this is the point we desire to prove, and what we think we can do to the satisfaction of our readers by the following anecdote:—

Being naturally of a most humane and benevolent character, as all our readers are—for none others would support our pennyworth—we have often lamented the abject condition and sufferings of our black urchins, and have come to the resolution never to assist in encouraging their degradation, but on the contrary to do everything in our power to oppose it. With this praiseworthy intention we recently sent for a gentleman who professes the art of increasing our domestic comforts by the aid of modern science as developed in our improved machinery—or in other words, we sent for him to clean the chimney of our study, not with a little boy, but with a proper modern machine constructed for the purpose. The said professor came accordingly, but to our astonishment not merely with his sweeping machine, but also with one of the objects of our pity and commiseration—a little black boy! The use of this attendant we did not immediately comprehend, nor did we ask, but proceeded at once to inquire of the professor the price of his services in the way we desired.

* Kilcrea Abbey, near Cork, was dedicated to Saint Bridget, and founded, A. D. 1494, by Cormac Lord Muskerry. Its monks belonged to the Franciscan order commonly called "the Grey Friars."